Do it ourselves

Everybody knows that government wastes money. Since the federal government takes in the most, it wastes the most. But the state, county and local governments blow their shares too.

One of the greatest shortcomings of government is the fact that many of the duties and obligations which used to be assumed by the people themselves have been taken over by the government. Fifty years ago, the poor were taken care of by friends and relatives, churches, the Salvation Army, and many other volunteer organizations. City streets were cleaned by the homeowners and shopkeepers.

The city playgrounds in Carbondale were built by neighborhood groups. The AAA sponsored the "Safety Patrol" and eighth grade boys fought for the honor of serving as school crossing guards.

The late mayor Frank Kelly had his "Junior Police Force." Kids were encouraged to obey the laws themselves and to report the wrongdoings of others.

What little public landscaping has been done around Carbondale was done by the Boy Scouts. The tall evergreen trees at the top of Canaan St. was planted by the scouts to hide the ugliness of the city dump. The project didn't cost the city a dime.

Today it seems that all of these functions have been taken over by government. The credo has become "Don't do for free what we can use tax dollars to accomplish!"

We'd like to see the trend reversed. We'll let the President work on cutting back at the federal level, while we concentrate on the local governments.

Maybe local governments could organize the civic clubs, churches, and schools to accomplish a variety of worthwhile projects. Carbondale Mayor Fred Mancuso, in an unofficial capacity, did exactly that when he called for a meeting of the civic organizations in the upvalley to promote his idea of a mobile intensive care unit. As a result, volunteers raised more than the $35,000 needed, and the emergency unit will soon go into operation.

Let's go a couple of steps further. Why can't the industrial arts classes make public benches, street signs, trash containers, etc.? Why can't the home economics classes help prepare meals for the shut-ins, mend clothing, etc.? Have any local governments asked for help from the state prisons in manufacturing needed items? What could the inmates at Farview do to help society?

There are plenty of people who would be willing to donate their time (and money) for community projects if they felt it was necessary and if they knew their volunteer work was in lieu of a tax increase. However, if the feeling is, "Well, that's the city's job," volunteers will never be found, because nobody likes to do for free what someone else gets paid to do with public funds.

We propose that the local governments in the Carbondale area appoint "Do It Ourselves" committees to coordinate the activities of volunteers and to reduce the costs of operating our cities, boroughs, and townships. It's a way of developing community pride and accomplishing something worthwhile at the same time.